

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### Bequet Confections

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

#### Product Research Yields Sweet Success At Bequet Confections

##### Client Profile:

Béquet Confections, at only 14 months old, already produces approximately 1,500 to 2,000 gourmet caramels a day to fill orders from 130 retail outlets in 6 states. Located in Bozeman, Montana, the company currently has two employees: Robin Béquet, founder, and her father, Ray.

##### Situation:

Béquet Confections uses only the freshest all-natural ingredients to produce its caramels. The company's commitment to freshness means that any delay in shipping threatens to take a big bite out of the product's three-week shelf-life. As the company began to consider expanding its national business, extending the shelf-life of the product became paramount. However, Ms. Béquet--standing by the company's mission to use only natural ingredients--refused to solve the problem with chemical additives. She turned to the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for help finding a solution.

##### Solution:

MMEC engaged in a collaborative search for ingredients with longer shelf-lives that might be used in Béquet Confections' products without compromising their quality. MMEC brought Ms. Béquet to a series of weekly meetings with the University Technical Assistance Program (an MMEC partner). Together, they shared what each knew and made to-do lists for further research; regrouping a week or so later, they would compare notes and weed out dead-end leads. An emulsifier did nothing for shelf-life and corrupted the product's taste. Several other ingredients were tested and failed. Finally, MMEC found the critical piece of the puzzle--a different type of sugar, which retained the integrity of the product but extended its shelf-life by two weeks. MMEC also helped set up a new caramel wrapping machine to make the process flow more efficient.

##### Results:

Extended product shelf-life to five weeks.  
Increased out-of-state market sales to 35 percent of overall revenues.  
Investigating additional ways to increase product shelf-life.

##### Testimonial:

[www.mep.nist.gov](http://www.mep.nist.gov)



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"The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center and University Technical Assistance Program engineers are on par with the best I've worked with in the industry. Very small businesses cannot afford to have an engineer on staff. When I think about all that I need to know and all that has to go on, it can be overwhelming. Knowing that [MMEC] is available [to help] takes away some of the intimidation factor."

Robin Béquet, Owner